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LIVING LOUDLY

The DJ who isn't hiding
a thing at Ferndale Pride

STATEHOUSE DREAMS

Deadnamed but determined,
trans chaplain keeps running

Pride Is
Personal

For Alise King, every
Pride performance
is a homecoming

By Kelli Dunham

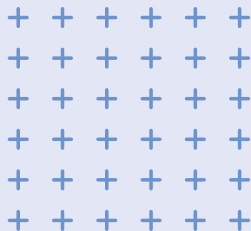
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- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 Deadnamed and Done With It: Hospital Chaplain Joanna Whaley's Complicated Road to a Downriver Statehouse Race
- 8 LGBTQ+ Seniors in Michigan Navigate a Housing System That Wasn't Built for Them
- 10 For Alise King, Pride Is Personal: The Detroit Soul Vocalist on Finding Her Voice as a Black Queer Woman
- 12 Creep of the Week: Turning Point USA Will Show You Into Heaven by Making Your Life Hell
- 13 The Scroll: Ypsi Fundraiser Rallies Community Around Trans Youth
- 14 A Haircut Can Change Everything: The Founder of The Hairpist Project Shares His Own Recovery Story
- 16 Your 2026 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar
- 18 Affirmations Executive Director: Come Rediscover the Center This Pride
- 24 Ferndale Pride DJ Zach Witness Is Done Playing It Straight
- 26 Every Box Tells a Story at This Ferndale Pride Fundraiser

Page 10



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5 **Queer** Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

If your slide into Pride Month starts with staring at your phone, wondering why everyone else seems to have calendared more fun than you, we've got great news: Southeast Michigan continues to provide an almost medically inadvisable number of things to do. This week's lineup includes drag kings, queer techies, art about liberation, glamorous business awards and the Detroit Institute of Arts saying, essentially, "You know what this museum needs? More sequins."

If you've been craving community, inspiration, networking, glitter or simply a reason to leave your apartment besides buying iced coffee, here's where to start.



Emma Sapphire. Photo: Instagram/@emma.sapphire

Revel in Drag Takeover at the DIA

The Detroit Institute of Arts is launching Pride Month with its first-ever all-ages drag showcase, "The Art of Drag," hosted by local drag artist Aphrodite and featuring performers Emma Sapphire, Canary, Rose Ritz, Sir Guy, Tessa Mystic and Valentine Rosé. The lineup promises glamour, lip syncs, comedy and multiple styles of drag performance from across Metro Detroit. Bring your friends. Bring your family. Bring someone who has never encountered drag beyond RuPaul and lovingly expand their horizons.

Friday, May 29, 7 p.m., Detroit Institute of Arts (5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit). bit.ly/artofdrag2026.



The Queertroit art exhibit runs through June 27. Photo: Instagram/@swordsintoplowshares_det

Wander Through 'Queertroit'

Since early May, the Swords Into Plowshares Detroit Peace Center and Gallery has been hosting "Queertroit 2026," a group exhibition exploring queer love, liberation, resistance and community through the lens of local art. "Queertroit 2026" features work curated by two Detroit locals: painter and relational artist Tisch Mikhail Lewis and fiber artist Izzy Hedin-Urrutia, creator of the online comic project "The Bad Homosexual." The installation closes at the end of June, so now is the time to get out and appreciate, while the appreciating is good.

Through June 27, Swords Into Plowshares Peace Center and Gallery (33 E. Adams Ave., Detroit). bit.ly/queertroit26.



Log Off and Link Up

Queer Tech Thursdays, hosted by the Detroit arm of the international organization Out in Tech, offers exactly what many of us desperately need: a reason to interact with other humans without relying entirely on Slack notifications and reaction emojis. The monthly gathering welcomes everyone from hardcore programmers to tech-adjacent folks and is intentionally welcoming, whether you're an intern, a CEO, a freelancer or someone quietly wondering, "Am I nerdy enough to be here?"

Second Thursday of the month (including June 11), 6-9 p.m., Pronto! Diner (608 S. Washington Ave., Royal Oak). bit.ly/outintechevents.



Cheer for Queens, Kings, Quings and Things

Ahead of Lansing Pride's June festival on June 27, the Lansing Pride Pageant returns for two glorious nights, celebrating drag in all its forms. Organizers promise "queens, kings, quings, monsters and things," which sounds like both a pageant and the world's most fashionable role-playing campaign. The competition is still open, so if you have the skills to match the "elevated drag standards" judges will be looking for (and the ability to come up with an ass-kicking drag name) perhaps you can join the outgoing Ms. Professional Lansing Pride, Crystal d'Light or Mx. Lansing Pride Mag N. Cheez in beautiful (and handsome) drag glory.

May 30 and 31, 6 p.m., The Studio at 414 (414 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing). lansingpride.org/pageant.

4



Colours Gala 2025. Photo: Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce

Celebrate Queer Entrepreneurs

The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce's COLOURS Pride Awards Gala is one of those events that manages to be both glamorous and deeply practical. Yes, there will be awards, live entertainment and outfits that will undoubtedly take the theme "Seen in Green" to its most fabulous conclusion. But the bigger goal is to support LGBTQ-owned businesses and help young queer entrepreneurs access training, resources and funding. The night includes a live pitch competition with a \$10,000 prize pool. If you've ever wanted to sit in a ballroom full of queer people passionately discussing both liberation and spreadsheets, friends, this is your night.

June 12, 6-10 p.m., Motor City Casino Hotel Grand Ballroom (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit). bit.ly/coloursgala26.

5



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Deadnamed and Done With It

Hospital chaplain Joanna Whaley's complicated road to a Downriver statehouse race



Joanna Whaley. Courtesy photo

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The Wayne County Clerk made it official May 12: Joanna Whaley is on the August primary ballot, and no amount of legal

maneuvering from a fellow Democrat is going to change that.

Wayne County Clerk Cathy M. Garrett formally rejected a challenge filed by Frank Liberati, a former state representative also

seeking Michigan's 2nd House District seat, who alleged that Whaley, a trans woman, had violated state campaign law by not listing her deadname on her affidavit of identity.

Whaley legally changed her name in 2025, a fact she demonstrated to the clerk's office, and she has been using the name Joanna in a common-law capacity since at least May 2022, far surpassing the six-month threshold required by statute. Jay Kaplan, the LGBTQ+ Rights Project staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan, explained that Whaley's situation "should absolutely satisfy the requirements to not list her deadname on the ballot alongside her name."

Whaley isn't rattled.

"It has shown people a contrast of what I and our campaign have been doing all along, as opposed to trying to be sneaky in the background," she said. "We've been public and out front with what we're doing, and those are the type of leaders that Downriver wants."

She's running for a seat currently held by Tullio Liberati, Frank's brother, who was among the eight House Democrats who voted in favor of a Republican-led resolution that would have banned transgender girls from playing school sports. That vote was part of what pushed Whaley, a Lincoln Park-based hospital chaplain and former evangelical pastor, into the race in the first place.

The district and the fight

House District 2 covers Lincoln Park, Allen Park, Melvindale and parts of Southgate, working-class Downriver communities that Whaley talks about with real warmth and zero romanticism.

"Our district is a no BS type of community," she told BTL. "They want their leaders to be clear and transparent to the public. One thing I hear consistently from voters who are more in the middle and on the right is that they may not fully agree with my politics, but they like that I'm open and that I'm present and they always know what I'm up to as a candidate."

The thing those voters keep bringing up isn't Whaley's identity. It's the economy, especially their utility bills. DTE Energy recently requested a half-billion dollars in rate increases after already seeking a quarter-billion dollars just months before, even as the company posts record profits.

Whaley wants to reform how monopoly utilities can ask for money and how they're compensated. She's also fighting for MiCare, a proposed statewide single-payer healthcare system, because she sees the human cost of the current system up close, every single day.

Whaley works as a clinical hospital chaplain, currently focused on hospice care. Her days move from virtual visits with families navigating end-of-life grief to in-person rounds at hospitals, long-term care facilities and private homes.

"One of the most heartbreaking conversations I have with people is when they say, 'I could fight this disease, but I can't afford it,'" she said. "And the most heartbreaking conversation I've ever had was with a patient who said, 'I could fight this, but I want to leave my children with all the money I've saved, and I don't want to spend it on trying to survive.'"

Whaley describes her work as an "honor."

"It sounds weird to love your job that requires you to be in a room with people finding out that their loved one has passed away," she said. "But I think that when it's all hitting the fan, you want someone who's going to be there and just be in the room and be willing to talk you through it. And I think that's what gives me a pretty unique skill set within our political space as well."

Whaley's path to chaplaincy winds through an unlikely career. She spent roughly 20 years in evangelical ministry, rising quickly in megachurch spaces and taking on pastoral responsibilities by age 20. She came out publicly at 34, after more than a decade of conversion therapy directed by church leadership and carried out with four different therapists. She was eventually fired when church leadership heard she was considering a gender transition, then found her way to an LGBTQ-affirming congregation in Royal Oak.

It was there that she first encountered queer people who had lost their faith communities. That experience, combined with the clinical chaplaincy work she discovered through an internship at the University of Michigan, pointed toward what came next. She went back to Eastern Michigan University to finish her senior year, then earned a master's degree in theology from seminary, where she studied liberation theology, which she describes as "the study of marginalized people within divine systems and within political systems." It set her up for politics, she says, in ways she didn't anticipate.

‘Just another Tuesday’

Whaley had expected attacks on her candidacy, just not from this direction. “This was just another Tuesday for me,” she said. “This one was much more public — but very rarely has an attack on who I am become a positive like it has this time.”

“I did not expect this from Frank Liberati. I expected this from one of the Republicans,” she added. “I absolutely would have expected this coming from the other side of the aisle, but not within my own party.”

Liberati did not respond to two requests for comment from BTL.

“If a Democratic member trying to seek the representative seat is trying to invalidate someone like myself from having access to a lawful name change, what else would he go after?” Whaley said about Liberati’s complaint. “And every time Frank tries to come after me, our campaign just gets stronger.”

The Michigan Legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus called Liberati’s challenge “meritless” in a statement and said it “serves no purpose but to stoke the flames of transphobia for personal political gain.” Michigan Democratic Party Chair Curtis Hertel said in a statement provided to BTL, “Democrats support the right of all people to live as their authentic selves — that includes candidates running for office. Attempts to disqualify candidates for using their legal name betrays the foundational principles of the Democratic Party.”

Whaley credits her ability to weather the resulting stress of Liberati’s attack, in part, to her years in evangelical spaces. Coming out in the middle of that world, subjected to conversion therapy and navigating deeply hostile institutions, built something in her that Liberati’s maneuvers haven’t been able to touch.

“Believe it or not, my faith was really shaken before I even came out,” she said. “I was working in very Christian nationalist spaces. One of the churches I worked for was really the hotbed of Christian nationalism within the Downriver area.” The rise of that movement sent her into what many would call deconstruction. Her faith today is broader, more universalist. “Christianity is my first language,” she said. “It is how I understand the divine.” She came out of that world far more politically clear-eyed and with a talent that has proven useful

on the campaign trail: spotting Christian nationalist dog whistles. “I know where that thought is going,” she said. “I speak fluent Republican.”

She’s also developed a thick skin after two decades in ministry and a resiliency that seems impossible to stop. If anything, she’s picked up steam since Liberati filed his complaints — as well as a good deal of campaign funds. Since the initial complaint gained public attention, her campaign cash on hand nearly tripled, going from around \$9,000 to \$25,000. She’s received endorsements from the LGBTQ Victory Fund, Run For Something and U.S. Rep. Sarah McBride, and has spoken with McBride directly for guidance on navigating

“Wherever you are in the state, if your state representative will not go to bat for you, I will represent you and I will show up even if it’s three hours away from my district. For those who feel that Christian nationalism scares them, just know that there are progressive Christians coming to fight this battle with you.”

— Joanna Whaley, Democratic candidate for Michigan House

this kind of moment.

There are real costs, though. She’s contracted with an executive protection firm that accompanies her to events, manages the logistics of where she stands in a room and how she exits. Her home has been outfitted with cameras. She has received credible threats that required police investigation.

“Sometimes I feel kind of ridiculous when I’m walking into events and there’s all my other state rep friends who roll in their car, and I have to walk in with two bodyguard bouncer-looking dudes following me around,” she said. “But that’s the reality of what we’re dealing with.”

Security, she said, “teeters on our top three campaign expenses at this point,” and a recent

See **Joanna Whaley**, page 9

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LGBTQ+ Seniors in Michigan Navigate a Housing System That Wasn't Built for Them

Older queer Michiganders facing discrimination are finding allies — and, sometimes, home

BY ASTER ASEM

America's housing crisis lands hardest on the people least equipped to absorb it. For LGBTQ+ seniors, finding affordable, affirming housing carries stakes that most policy conversations never acknowledge — discrimination, bureaucratic dead ends and the constant threat of having to hide who you are just to keep a roof overhead.

Jeremy Weaver knows that territory well. A senior queer man who now rents low-income housing in Pontiac, Weaver spent five months after returning to the U.S. from living abroad getting bounced between agencies that were supposed to help him secure subsidized housing in Ann Arbor — wrong county, wrong paperwork, no job to cover the gap. Nothing ever panned out, and his experience reflects a much wider pattern.

Sexual minority adults are twice as likely as the general population to have experienced homelessness in their lifetime, according to the Williams Institute. Nearly half of older same-sex couples applying for senior housing face discrimination, per an Equal Rights Center report, and LGBTQ+ older adults are four times less likely to access the community aging services they need — even when they urgently need them. In Michigan alone, around 400,000 aging LGBTQ+ adults are navigating a housing landscape that was never designed with them in mind.

What makes the situation so difficult to untangle is that housing scarcity is only part of the picture. Weaver lists some of the costs someone would need to cover on a low income beyond rent alone: “Going grocery shopping, going to the pharmacy, having transportation, having [a] social life, having a nightlife, having skills, going to school, learning how to cook, learning how to clean,” and the list goes on. Those are challenges for anyone stretched thin, but for people rebuilding their lives after a period of homelessness, there's no safety net to fall back on. “Transitioning from the streets to a home, how to do a budget, all the things to live somewhere successfully,” he cites as challenges. “If you didn't know how to do it already because you were homeless for a



long time, you're in trouble. And the reason you're homeless is probably cause you never got [what you need] then, either.”

The many forms of housing insecurity in the U.S. involve more than simply having a warm place to sleep, though even that baseline can fall short — just ask Texas, where a catastrophic 2021 power grid failure left millions of residents without heat in subfreezing temperatures, including many in low-income housing. Systems that are supposed to set people up for success often fail members of marginalized communities most, and those who fall through the cracks can find themselves with few resources if no one picks up the slack.

MiGen, Michigan's LGBTQ+ elders network, has taken on the mission of helping LGBTQ+ people 45 or older navigate the many complicated aspects of a societal structure that often doesn't want to help.

“We do everything from Medicare counseling, utility support, food navigation, fun social events and things like that across the state,” explains Kat Hutton, MiGen's director of programs. “And on the training and education side, we train other providers on serving the LGBTQ+ community [and] older adults.”

MiGen has also been a key partner in the development of the Raymond E. Shepherd House, a 53-unit affordable housing complex that opened in Ferndale in late

2024. The four-story building at Nine Mile and Paxton Street was developed by Full Circle Communities in partnership with Metropolitan Community Church - Detroit (MCC-Detroit), Affirmations, Corktown Health and MiGen, a collaboration nearly a decade in the making. Named after a lifelong Ferndale resident and out gay man who died in 2018, the Shepherd House was built to give LGBTQ+ seniors a place to live without hiding who they are. While fair housing laws prevent it from being exclusively LGBTQ+, all residents must abide by community guidelines prohibiting discrimination and harassment, and the building's partners have been clear that an affirming environment is non-negotiable.

“We also provide pro bono consultation to providers who want to start doing something for LGBTQ+ older adults,” Hutton adds. “Maybe they don't know where to start, or maybe they've started and it's not as successful as they want it to be. So we also offer consultation and assistance to other providers in the space trying to serve our population.”

Weaver's own path back to stable housing required navigating a system that seemed designed to exhaust people into giving up. After applications with University of Michigan's housing division and the Ann Arbor Housing Commission both failed to help him secure housing, he settled into

low-income housing in Pontiac — grateful for stability, but clear-eyed about its limitations. “I started encountering the housing division in the geriatric services at the University of Michigan as well as the Ann Arbor Housing Commission, and they were supposed to give me housing and it just kept being paperwork — paperwork [for] five months — and nothing ever panned out.”

Weaver's experience with red tape is all too familiar to many people struggling to secure housing in the current economic landscape, where available rentals are often scooped up by out-of-town investors. Almost 27% of home purchases in the first quarter of 2025 nationwide were by people who don't live in them as their primary residence. By 2030, institutional investors may control 40% of U.S. single-family rental homes — a trend

that directly erodes the housing stock available for low-income designation.

Weaver, who volunteers as a housing advocate, said many people in need “don't have the funds [for an apartment]. And the [agencies] that are supposed to provide those on a more macro level to everyone do not. Seniors in this building have transportation issues.” He says the Pontiac bus system doesn't meet residents' needs, nor does the SMART paratransit service. “You can only buy at the grocery store what you can bring home on your lap.” Delivery services from places like Meijer aren't cheap, and using SNAP benefits to pay for delivery fees can be unintuitive for people less comfortable with online technology.

People experiencing poverty typically face multiple intersecting issues, and for those who are part of a marginalized community (or multiple intersecting marginalized communities) the stress compounds accordingly. “Imagine trying to be openly queer, trying to be openly marginalized,” Weaver says. “Your HIV status or your disability... maybe you wouldn't reveal it.” Even when community members try to pick up the slack, discrimination can discourage people from participating. In Weaver's

See **Senior Housing**, page 38



Joanna Whaley. Courtesy photo

Joanna Whaley

Continued from page 7

coffee shop meet-and-greet required multiple armed security guards on site because the threats ahead of it were credible enough to warrant them. “It feels like so much overkill for a House race,” she said. “But the reality is that we’ve seen so much violence across the country towards elected officials.”

When she’s not campaigning or working, Whaley carves out space to just be herself. She has three young daughters, ages 10, 8 and 6, and every other weekend belongs entirely to them, no campaign calls, no events, no candidate mode. And every Tuesday night, she has dinner with her mom.

‘We’re coming’

Whaley is one of three transgender women seeking election to the Michigan House in 2026, a first in state history. The group, which includes Toni Mua in District 9 and Aaron Bailey in District 92, has taken to calling themselves the Dollhouse. Michigan has never elected an openly transgender state representative.

“I understand the potential historic significance of what this race could mean

for our community,” Whaley said. She says she and Mua have discussed “the weight of responsibility of this moment.”

“Wherever you are in the state, if your state representative will not go to bat for you, I will represent you and I will show up even if it’s three hours away from my district,” she said. “For those who feel that Christian nationalism scares them, just know that there are progressive Christians coming to fight this battle with you.”

The support from within the party has surprised her.

“I’ve just been overwhelmed by the response of people across our party,” she said. “I’m really thankful for those that have spoken up to say this isn’t OK, because I have not always experienced that when faced with hatred.”

Through all of it, she says, the thing she’s actually here to do hasn’t changed.

“I’m just here trying to talk about getting our utility bills down,” she said. “I’m here trying to get single-payer healthcare in the state of Michigan. These are the things that I’m talking about, and everyone else is bringing up my gender.”

Joanna Whaley is running in the Aug. 4 Democratic primary for Michigan’s 2nd House District. She faces Frank Liberati and Gary Schlack. Check vote411.org to confirm your voter status and to see sample ballots for upcoming elections.

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For Alise King, Pride Is *Personal*

The Detroit soul vocalist on finding her voice as a queer Black woman — and why every Pride set feels like a homecoming



Alise King. Courtesy photo

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Before the first note lands, Alise King is already doing something arguably even harder than singing — she’s reading the room. A Detroit vocalist rooted in R&B, soul and gospel, King has built a reputation for performances that don’t just sound powerful, but feel personal. Her voice carries the kind of control and emotional range that can cut through even the chaos of an outdoor Pride festival. And her stage presence makes it clear she’s not just performing at a crowd, but connecting with it.

A multi-award-winning artist, King has been recognized with honors including the Spirit of Detroit Award and multiple Detroit music awards, including being named Best R&B Female Artist at the Detroit Black Music Awards. She was also named the Detroit winner of BET’s “Apollo Live.” Over the years, she’s been the opening acts for icons like Chaka Khan, George Clinton, Cynthia Erivo and Aretha Franklin — a testament to her staying power as a live performer. Her most recent EP was 2022’s “Love Drunk,” and she is currently back in the studio recording “Diary of a Soul Singer,” a more introspective project with songs that focus on the singer’s interior life.

King will kick off her Impossible Dreams Tour by headlining Ferndale Pride on May 30, hitting the stage at 8 p.m. on the Credit Union One Performance Stage. You can also catch her on the Pride Stage at Motor City Pride at 4 p.m. on June 7. In our interview, King reflects on building trust with audiences, finding her voice as a queer artist and how she turns even the most unpredictable stage into something that feels like home.

Outdoor Pride events can be tough environments for performers. But based on the videos floating around the internet, it seems like you’ve really figured out how to connect in that space. How did you get there?

It took trial and error — years of it — to really hone my craft. Especially with outdoor performances, it’s very different. You’ve got a massive crowd, open air and completely different acoustics. But I don’t want any of that to be a distraction. My focus is making sure my voice still reaches people — really reaches them — and connects with their hearts and minds. That’s always the goal. Pride events are

for our community, so I want to give to people both on and off the stage. I’m not just there to perform. I do meet-and-greets, I connect, give hugs, give love, give encouragement, give support. That’s the mindset I go into it with. I want people to know I’m not just showing up to get paid. I’m showing up to say, “Hey, family.”

LGBTQ+ audiences are not comparable to any other audience. The energy is so high, the love is indescribable. For the longest time, I was trying to find my voice as an African American queer woman. I’m a woman first. I’m African American second, and I’m queer. I had a lot working against me. So I set my sights on making those things my superpower. When I said, “You know what, I’m just going to be me,” I had one of those moments where I could finally breathe. This is what I’m supposed to do. I’ve learned so much from so many different cultures and communities at Pride events. It’s opened my mind and my heart to a whole new way of looking at the world. I’ve met amazing people and heard some of the most inspiring stories.

Do you have a specific moment that really inspired you?

I performed at a Pride festival in Ohio where I met a young man named Zach. It was his first Pride — he was maybe 14 or 15. His aunt brought him because his dad had put him out when he came out, and he was living with her. Zach’s aunt accepted him, but all he wanted was for his dad to be there. We talked, and I gave him one of my CDs. He kept saying, “I just wish my dad could see me like this, right now, in this moment.”

Then, as we were leaving the venue, we saw Zach with his aunt — and his dad had come. His dad showed up. His aunt had told him, “This is the happiest I’ve ever seen your son. You need to see this.” There was this embrace — hugging, crying. I stood there watching and started crying myself. I walked back to my trailer in tears because it was such a powerful moment. It was beautiful.

That’s about as powerful as it gets.

And I related to it, to some extent, because I got kicked out when I came out at 18. And my mom came around. But it didn’t happen quickly. I think a lot of parents struggle because they don’t know their child can be happy this way. When my mom saw that I had a community around me, it changed things.

She realized I wasn't alone. I think she had been afraid — afraid of what people would say, afraid of her child being judged or excluded. I grew up in a very religious family, and she's a mama bear — there are nine of us — so she was protective. She didn't want people talking about her child in a negative way, and I understood that.

A big turning point was my grandmother talking to her — her mom. She told her, "You can't live her life for her. She has to live her life, just like I let you live yours." And then other people helped her see things differently, including my pastor at the time, whose daughter is gay. It opened her mind. Sometimes it takes someone outside the situation to help a parent understand, because emotions run so high. After that, my mom apologized, and things started to shift. At the end of the day, she just wants me to be happy, whatever that looks like. Even if it doesn't fully align with her beliefs, she understands it's not her life to live.

Even now, 20 years later, she's still getting used to it in some ways. But she fully accepts me. She comes to Pride festivals. She's my biggest fan.

Wow — the magic of Pride! So was it always smooth sailing in the month of June? Has it always been easy to make Pride such an important part of your performing career?

I used to get a lot of backlash for doing Pride festivals because my band at the time was primarily straight men. They had these stereotypes — like the idea that if someone is gay, they automatically want you. And I'm like, "Listen, I have a type. Just because I'm gay and you're a woman, or he's gay and you're a man, doesn't mean anyone automatically wants you."

Through working with me, those straight men got to see who we really are as a community. They gained understanding, and with that came respect. A lot of them are now allies. Even though I don't work with some of those guys anymore, they walked away knowing something important: We're just like you. We're no different.

A lot of the fan commentary online talks about your ability to really read a crowd. Can you talk about a moment where that changed your performance in real time?

There was a moment at Ann Arbor Pride last year. I was on stage singing, and I felt this energy pulling at me. There was a massive crowd, so I couldn't see everyone's faces, but I could feel it. This energy felt heavy. So I stopped mid-song and scanned the crowd. I saw a woman to the left of the stage, just bawling. I said, "You — come here." She and her partner came forward, and she was sobbing. I could tell she was carrying something heavy. I said,

"I'm going to repeat this verse." I was singing CeeLo Green's "Crazy," which is about wanting to be yourself when people try to make you feel like something's wrong with you. I sang it again, and she broke down. I told her, "There's nothing wrong with you. You are exactly who you're supposed to be. Be unapologetic. Set your boundaries. Love yourself louder than anybody else will." She kept saying, "I needed to hear that." Whatever she was feeling in that moment, I was able to meet her there through the music — because I've been there before.

After the set, I went straight to her and gave her a hug. When I first started, I used to be in my head: "Do they like me? Are they laughing at me?" But once I became sure of myself, I let that go. When you carry that confidence on stage, the audience feels it.

"I'm not just there to perform. I do meet-and-greets, I connect, give hugs, give love, give encouragement, give support. That's the mindset I go into it with. I want people to know I'm not just showing up to get paid. I'm showing up to say, 'Hey, family.'"

What can audiences expect from your Pride sets this year?

Listen, this year especially, we're going to dance, we're going to sing. I want people dancing until they're sweating. I want people to levitate. I don't want anyone sitting down — I want them completely captivated. I'm looking forward to the dancing, the laughter, and seeing people smile. I want to see the voguing. And yes — I'm pulling people on stage. Come dance with me!

The whole show is going to match that energy. I've got my drummer, my musical director and an incredible team — people from the community and allies. When I tell you we're about to get down, I mean it. I always map out my set, and honestly, 45 minutes wasn't enough. It was hard to cut songs because I want to give a little bit of everything — a little bit of me in every song. And I'm getting a custom outfit made, so I can't say too much. But it's going to be grand. Just know there will be some thighs out. In the end, I want people to walk away feeling encouraged, supported, seen. And to know that they matter. For me, this is more than a performance. It's my purpose.





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Turning Point USA Will Show You Into Heaven by Making Your Life Hell



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

It's hard to believe that Charlie Kirk died only eight months ago. Honestly, it feels like years ago. It feels like yesterday. It feels like time is a cruel trick, a series of absolutely insane events perpetuated by a continually gaslighting U.S. government. Republicans are very firmly at the heart of this, but Democrats are much less an opposition party than they are an appeasement party. Truly wild that Democrats are still acting like working with Republicans is not only possible, but preferable to destroying these fascists wholesale.

But hey, I'm always willing to be surprised. If the Democrats want to shock the hell out of me, go for it! Prove me wrong. I've never wanted to be more wrong in my life.

Anyway, back to Kirk. His murder was framed as a pivotal galvanizing point of the conservative movement. It was supposed to bring young people (young, white, Christian men, mostly) running into the arms not only of the Republican Party, but also evangelical Christianity.



Look, these folks have to sensationalize everything because the reality is, well, largely boring.

For a period of time after his killing, it was forbidden to speak ill of Kirk, with sites like Bluesky suspending people left and right for making comments perceived as derisive. But the huge uprising of red-hatted, Jesus-loving, Trump-supporting young'uns hasn't happened.

A fine example of this faux-uprising is Turning Point USA Faith's "Make Heaven Crowded" tour.

Now, evangelical Christians believe that people who have accepted Jesus will go to heaven. I understand that. But they have to die first, which makes the whole "Make Heaven Crowded" thing pretty macabre considering what happened

to Kirk.

One could also argue that the conservatives were doing a fine job making heaven crowded with their firm stance against any kind of gun violence prevention. Maybe that's all part of the grand plan.

In a recent Salon piece titled "TPUSA's 'Make Heaven Crowded' revival tour is a disaster," senior politics writer Amanda Marcotte peels back the curtain on an event so poorly attended not even celebrity widow Erika Kirk is showing up.

"The Make Heaven Crowded tour is sponsored by Preborn!, an anti-abortion group, and each stop features heavy-handed shaming of women who have abortions," writes Marcotte. "One speaker after another turns to politics,

such as Blaze Media's Allie Beth Stuckey, who lectures the crowd about how same-sex marriage and abortion supposedly offend God, or Christian commentator Millicent Sedra, who argues that this is an age of 'sexual perversion' based on 'young people dressed up as fairies, dressed up as dogs' and 'kitty litters in the toilets.'"

Why are these people so obsessed with toilets? Why do they want so badly to believe that absolutely wild things are happening in public school restrooms? Everything from kids getting lunch break "sex changes" to kids using litter boxes — these claims keep getting repeated as if they are the gospel

truth. Gosh, what could possibly be the reason?

Look, these folks have to sensationalize everything because the reality is, well, largely boring. Take trans kids, for example. The Fill 'er Up Heaven folks want people to think that trans kids live this wild life of debauchery when in reality much of a trans kid's life is filled with going to school, doing (or not doing) homework, getting nagged by parents to clean their bedrooms, hanging out with friends and playing video games.

"I got this crazy belief that everything in life is theological," Lucas Miles, TPUSA Faith director, told Salon. "Every issue that you can think about is actually first and foremost a spiritual issue."

Um, sure. I guess. I certainly think that every issue has a moral component, though I doubt that Miles and I share the same morality. For example, I think the most moral thing humans can do on this earth is to work to relieve the suffering of others — making sure people have healthcare, housing and food. All things that are entirely within reach if the United States had the will, because we definitely have the money. I mean, we had no problem finding the money to bomb schoolchildren in Iran, but Republicans (and a disturbing number of Democrats) want you to believe we don't have it to feed schoolchildren in the U.S.

Bullshit.

But that's not the kind of suffering the Ram 'Em and Cram 'Em Into Heaven crowd is interested in — at least not the kind they want to relieve. Causing it doesn't seem to be a problem for them considering that they consistently vote for a party that does everything it can to make the lives of the most vulnerable people in the U.S. more painful.

Maybe folks trying to sell you a heaven that depends on creating hell on earth don't have your best interests at heart.

Ypsi Fundraiser
Rallies Community
Around Trans
Youth

When two of Michigan’s largest hospital systems stepped back from gender-affirming care for minors last year, trans youth and their families in southeast Michigan were left scrambling. Corner Health Center in Ypsilanti didn’t flinch — and now the community is showing up for them.

The Huron Valley Democratic Socialists of America is hosting the second in an ongoing series of fundraisers supporting

the youth clinic May 30 at the Regal Beagle. Co-chair Lauren Gaboury told BTL the response has been “astonishing and overwhelming,” with local artists, business owners and volunteers rallying around the cause. Corner Health serves patients ages 12-25 at 47 N. Huron St. on a sliding-scale fee.

The event runs 7-9 p.m. at 817 E. Michigan Ave. and features live music, custom button-making, a pool tournament and a raffle. It’s 21 and over, cash bar only. Trans youth and families seeking care can reach Corner Health at cornerhealth.org or 734-484-3600.



Wisconsin
Brewery Turns
Banned Song
Into Rallying Cry

After the Watertown, Wisconsin school board voted to ban the high school wind symphony from performing “A Mother of a Revolution!,” an instrumental piece honoring Black transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, Kirk Bangstad had a different idea.

The owner of Northern Wisconsin’s Minocqua Brewing Company invited the students to perform the banned piece at his Madison taproom’s beer garden on May 23. The post went viral, tickets sold out almost immediately and by May 18, donations to help the band purchase its own instruments had reached nearly \$50,000.

The school board had also barred students from using school-owned instruments at unsanctioned events. Band directors and music stores across the Midwest stepped in with loaners. The concert will be livestreamed at facebook.com/MBCBrews. Read the full story at pridesource.com.

Remembering Jason
Collins, the NBA’s First
Openly Gay Active Player

Jason Collins, the first openly gay active player in any of the four major North American professional sports leagues, died May 12 at 47

after a battle with stage 4 glioblastoma. In a 2013 Sports Illustrated essay, Collins announced his sexuality with characteristic directness: “I’m a 34-year-old NBA center. I’m Black. And I’m gay.”

A Stanford graduate and standout defender who helped the New Jersey Nets reach back-to-back Eastern Conference championships in 2002 and 2003, Collins went on after retirement to become an NBA Cares ambassador and

tireless LGBTQ+ advocate. He is survived by his husband, Brunson Green.

NBA Hall of Famer Charles Barkley, reflecting on Collins’ death during May 13’s “Inside the NBA,” noted that more than a decade later, no other NBA player has come out. “We live in a homophobic society,” Barkley said, “and that’s unfortunate.”

Mother Monster Drops
Must-See Concert Film

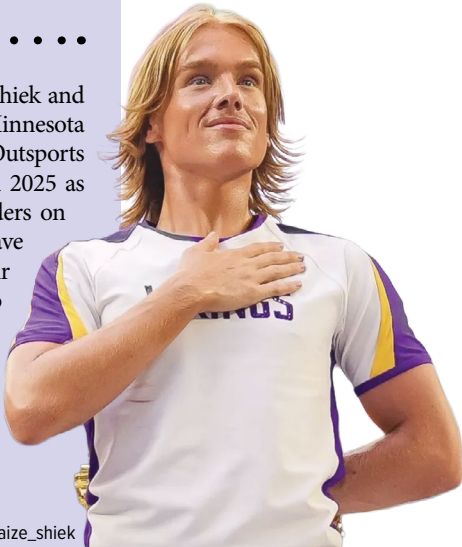
Lady Gaga closed out her “Mayhem” era the way only she could: a phone-free, lottery-only show at Los Angeles’ intimate Wiltern Theatre, now streaming on Apple Music, Apple TV and Prime Video. Filmed before just 2,300 lucky fans, “Mayhem Requiem” strips her biggest recent tracks down to their bones — Gaga mostly at the piano or synths, reimagining “Abracadabra,” “Disease” and even her Bruno Mars duet “Die with a Smile” into something darker and stranger than the originals.

The Sapphic Slasher
We’ve Been Waiting For

Trans nonbinary director Jane Schoenbrun, whose “I Saw the TV Glow” became a queer cult touchstone, is back with a Cannes-buzzed slasher starring out bi actor Hannah Einbinder as a queer filmmaker who falls into something complicated with a franchise’s original final girl, played by Gillian Anderson. Einbinder calls it a “trans sapphic ode to marginalized communities.” It hits theaters Aug. 7.

Gay Vikings Cheerleaders
Set to Return

Openly gay cheerleaders Blaize Shiek and Louie Conn are returning to the Minnesota Vikings squad for a second season, Outsports reported. The pair made history in 2025 as the first openly gay male cheerleaders on the Vikings’ roster, weathering a wave of online homophobia after their debut went viral. Both responded to critics with characteristic ease, and the Vikings stood firmly behind them throughout. Now heading into year two, they’re back on the sidelines where they belong.



Blaize Shiek. Photo: Instagram/@blaize_shiek

A Haircut Can Change Everything

The founder of The Hairapist Project in Northern Michigan shares his own recovery story — and how a fresh look is an introduction to yourself

BY SAMUEL ZEERYP

Mirrors are confrontational. In early recovery, they can feel almost hostile. You catch your reflection when you're not expecting it, in a bathroom or in the window of a passing car, and for a second it throws you. The person looking back doesn't quite match who you think you are.

Addiction doesn't just affect behavior. It changes how you carry yourself, how you show up, how you see yourself. Over time, it starts to distort your sense of identity. For a lot of people in those first months of sobriety, the mirror becomes something you avoid at all costs.

I know that because I've lived it. I'm a gay man in recovery, sober since July 29, 2024, and one thing I've learned is that shame doesn't just disappear when the substances are gone. It lingers. You see it in the way people look down when they talk or avoid eye contact altogether. You hear it in small, quiet statements like, "I just don't feel like myself." That space, right there between shame and recognition, is where The Hairapist Project was born.

Based out of Northern Michigan in Petoskey, the project is simple on the surface: I provide free hair transformations for people in recovery from substance use and behavioral addictions. But what I'm actually doing is life-changing work in a deeply misunderstood community. At its core, it's not really about the hair. It's about giving someone who's starting over a real chance at changing their life.

I'm a licensed cosmetologist, a certified peer recovery coach through CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery), and I spent five years studying social work before coming back to finish my degree. I'm not a clinician, and I don't present myself as one. I know the psychology of shame intimately: I've built my work around it.

Most recovery environments focus, understandably, on sobriety first: stability, structure, getting through the day without using. That matters. But appearance, and the role it plays in identity, often gets overlooked. When someone is coming out of addiction, they're not just trying to stay sober. They're trying to figure out who they are again, and when they look in the mirror, all they see is what they've been through.

People in recovery often need expensive, longer term transitional help for things like dental work, medical care and housing,



Cosmetologist and substance use recovery coach Samuel Zeeryp. Courtesy photo

issues which can be complicated and take many months to resolve. In the meantime, hair transformation is something I can actually offer right away. It's immediate, visible and something a person can walk away with the same day and see every time they look at themselves. That matters

more than people think. Confidence and the ability to like the person looking back at you in the mirror don't come easy for anyone, let alone for people wrestling with their identities in such an intimate way.

The transformation is the introduction

The first moment after the hair transformation is when someone starts to

recognize themselves again. Maybe they stand a little straighter, maybe they make eye contact for the first time in a while, maybe they walk into a job interview feeling just a little more confident than they did the day before.

When I told one nominee she'd be one of the first participants in The Hairapist Project, she started crying before I even finished explaining it. It wasn't about the haircut or color. It was about being seen and invested in at a time when she didn't feel adequate. That moment made it clear to me that I was exactly where I was supposed to be. This work isn't about appearance. It's about transformation inside and out, and I've seen firsthand how something as simple as feeling seen can change the course of somebody's life.

The project's reach has already started to extend beyond Northern Michigan. Earlier this spring, The Hairapist Project's Instagram entry was selected by international hair educator and salon owner Presley Poe as the winner of the Presley Poe + Friends 2026 contest — a competition that draws entries from across the industry and that Poe judges personally, looking not for the most polished work but for the story and heart behind it. The win brought an invitation to Frederick, Maryland, to shadow Poe during their annual hair show weekend at The Temple Academy, a rare mentorship opportunity that speaks to what The Hairapist Project has been building from the beginning.

A lot of LGBTQ+ people understand the complexities of identity long before addiction is ever part of the story. Growing up queer often means figuring out who you are while also dealing with who the world expects you to be, and that disconnect can stick with you. For some people, it turns into shame. For others, it shows up in how they see themselves physically. And for many, it becomes part of a larger pattern that can include substance use.

Research from the National Institute on Drug Abuse has found that LGBTQ+ individuals experience higher rates of substance use disorders than their heterosexual counterparts, often tied to stigma, rejection and long-term stress. For gay men especially, there's a tremendous amount wrapped up in appearance,

expectation and belonging, and it can get complicated fast.

As I recall from my own journey, when recovery starts, it's not just about stopping. It's about sitting with everything underneath it, and that can be brutal. You finally stop running, and now you're face to face with yourself. No distractions, no escape. Just you. That's the part people don't talk about enough, but it's also where change starts, if you let it.

Everyone who participates in the project receives their transformation at no cost, but what matters just as much is what happens after. I offer ongoing peer recovery coaching, also free, and some of those sessions are recorded so people can follow the journey beyond the initial transformation. Not everything is filmed, but enough is shared to



Cosmetologist and substance use recovery coach Samuel Zeeryp with The Hairapist Project's first client, Heidi. Courtesy photo

show that recovery isn't a single moment. It's what happens next.

Addiction can take everything from a person — time, relationships, trust, health. Recovery doesn't fix everything overnight, but it does create the possibility for something different. Sometimes, it begins with standing in front of a mirror and realizing the person you thought was gone is still there.

The Hairapist Project is still growing. If you know someone in recovery who could benefit from a free transformation, nominations are open at samuel@thehairapistproject.com.



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Your 2026 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar

Dozens of fests, one fabulous Michigan Pride season

It's Pride time again, beloved LGBTQ+ folks and queers of every (and any!) gender.

And yes, we know — you are, in fact, proud all year 'round. But there is something particularly necessary (maybe even medicinal) about pausing the collective doomscroll for a minute to celebrate the freedoms we still have, the communities we've built and the glitter-forward resilience that continues to keep us here, alive, hydrated and slightly sunburned.

One of the true perks of life in our beloved Mitten State is that we are not scraping together one or two events and calling it a season. We have dozens of independent Pride celebrations, each with its own vibe, scale and very real potential for you to leave with something unexpected — from a cute temporary dolphin tattoo to a life decision your future self will have very strong opinions about.

If miles of packed street festival energy makes you want to lie down in a dark room, then sure, the glorious chaos of Ferndale Pride might not be your scene. But there is absolutely a smaller, chiller, bring-a-lawn-chair option with your name on it. Or a lakeside one. Or one where you accidentally learn something. Or one where you mostly just eat kettle corn and feel feelings.

Despise all things drag? Well. That does narrow the field. But we respect your journey.

The point is: Your Pride flavor is out there. It might require a little driving, a little planning and at least one emergency snack stop. But we promise, it will be worth it.

Or at least it will be a good story.

Help us keep our calendar up to date! Email sarah@pridesource.com with details about fests we're missing.

Single-day events are in chronological order, alphabetized by date. Multi-day events are placed in the calendar in the order of the earliest event.



MAY

Saturday, May 30

Ferndale Pride

Downtown Ferndale, 12:30-10 p.m.

ferndalepride.com

There are a few moments on the calendar that reliably make our queer little hearts perk up, and seeing Ferndale Pride land in late May — just before our sacred month of June — is one of them. It's like the world's most robust, glitter-forward opening act. And yes, the folks at Ferndale Pride are busy all year (Hot Daddies, Pokémon trivia, general delight), but there's something deeply reassuring about watching the season kick off this big.

As Michigan's largest free, open-to-the-public LGBTQ+ festival, the event takes over downtown Ferndale in the most joyful, civic, slightly chaotic way. West 9 Mile from Woodward to Livernois becomes a full-on queer

ecosystem: 220-plus vendors, local businesses, community orgs, resources and at least three booths where you will say, "I did not know I needed this. I absolutely need this."

And truly, there is something for everyone. There's a Children's Area right in the center of the event with activities, kid-focused vendors, books, toys and resources like adoption and foster care info — plus Readings With Royalty, which is exactly as beautifully kid-nerd friendly as it sounds. There's a dedicated Baby Feeding Area with seating, electricity for pumping, space to mix a bottle and actual lactation specialists on hand, because we love competence and care in this house.

If you're someone who needs a break from the sensory onslaught (hi, many of us), there are quiet and sensory-sensitive spaces to rest and regroup. There are water refill stations (bring your bottle, your future self will thank you), and a substance-free recovery zone

where sober and sober-curious folks can connect, participate in activities or just exist without pressure. HIV testing is available on-site, and organizations like Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, are open, air-conditioned and offering gender-neutral bathrooms and additional safe space throughout the day.

And then, of course, there are the stages. The Woodward Dance Stage for your "I came to move my body and forget my inbox" needs. The Planavon Performance Stage for bands, drag and the kind of talent that makes you text someone "get over here immediately." Two stages, constant energy and at least one moment where you think, "OK, I live here now."

Practical note, delivered with love: Parking is... aspirational. If you want to make your day easier (and leave accessible spots for folks who truly need them), check out Ferndale Pride's very thorough transportation guide ahead of time.

Or better yet: bike. There's a free, supervised bike lot near 9 Mile and Farmdale (thank you, Ted's Bike Shop), where someone will literally watch your bike like it's their own child. You can also grab a MoGo bike and use the code PRIDE2026 for a discount, which feels like a win for your wallet and your parking stress levels.

Owosso Pride In The Park

Curwood Castle Park (224 Curwood Castle Drive, Owosso), 1-5 p.m.

owossopride.org/owosso-pride-festival

Owosso's fourth annual Pride festival returns to the shady, storybook charm of Curwood Castle Park — and if you're planning a Pride event within a park with the moniker "castle," we are, of course, required by law to lean into the name.

The event kicks off at 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 30 and it's basically a gentle, joy-filled wander

through everything good about community. Think music drifting through the trees, bubbles doing their important bubble work, face painting, balloons and the kind of live performances that make you pause mid-snack and go, "OK wait, I love this."

JUNE

Friday, June 5

Ironwood Pride

Pride UP Festival Picnic in the Park (on June 6)

City Square Park (101 W. Aurora St., Ironwood), noon-5 p.m.

ironwoodareapride.com

Don't sleep on the Upper Peninsula this Pride season. Unless it's napping in a hammock between events! The UP's smaller Pride celebrations are packed with big heart, small-town charm

See **2026 Pride Calendar**, page 18



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Come Rediscover Affirmations This Pride

Executive director Tracy Hall on rebuilding trust — and why now is the moment to walk back through the door



BY TRACY HALL

Every June, Pride invites us to step into the streets with color, courage and celebration. It's a moment when our community becomes visible in ways that feel joyful and defiant all at once. But Pride is also something quieter — a chance to look inward, to reconnect with the places and people who have held us, challenged us and helped us grow. For many in Southeast Michigan, Affirmations has been one of those places. And as the executive director, I feel both the weight and the privilege of stewarding a space that means so much to so many.

This year, I want to extend a simple, heartfelt invitation: Come rediscover Affirmations. Come rediscover what this place can be for you.

When I stepped into this role, I knew I was joining an organization with a long, beautiful and, at times, complicated history. I also knew that not everyone felt connected to Affirmations anymore. Some drifted away because life shifted; some stepped back because they didn't feel seen or represented; some were hurt by past decisions or by systems that didn't fully reflect the diversity and brilliance of our community. And some simply haven't walked through our doors in years, held back not by disinterest but by uncertainty.

I hear that, and I honor it. And I am committed to doing something about it.

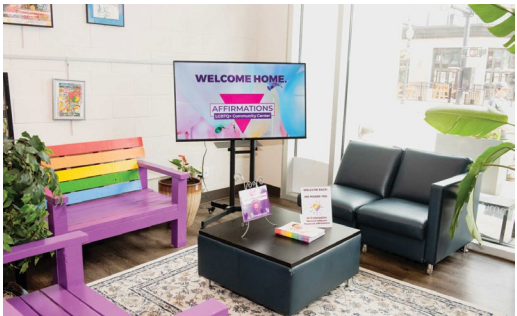
Affirmations is in a season of rediscovery, too. We are rebuilding with intention — deepening trust, strengthening relationships and expanding a sense of belonging that reaches across race, gender identity, age, disability, class and lived experience. We are asking harder questions about who feels welcome, who feels safe and who still feels left out. And we are listening with humility and accountability.

That's why Pride matters so much this year. Think of it as an open door.

When you walk into Affirmations during Pride Month — whether it's for a community conversation, a youth event, a support group, a volunteer shift or simply to sit on the couch and breathe — you're stepping into a space that is actively reshaping itself around the people who show up. Your presence helps define what Affirmations becomes next.

Rediscovering Affirmations doesn't mean returning to what it used to be. It means imagining what it could be with you in the room.

Maybe that looks like finding a support group that finally feels like your people. Maybe it's joining a conversation about safety, healing and what true inclusion requires. Maybe it's reconnecting with old friends or



Gathering area at Affirmations. Photo: Andrew Potter

making new ones. Maybe it's offering your perspective on what's missing or what needs to change. Maybe it's simply remembering what it feels like to be in a place where you don't have to explain yourself.

And maybe, for some, rediscovery means naming the ways Affirmations hasn't always gotten it right. That honesty is part of the work. Pride was born from protest, from truth-telling, from refusing to accept less than full dignity. Our community deserves spaces that reflect that legacy. I am committed to leading Affirmations in a way that honors that truth, even when it's uncomfortable.

Affirmations is not perfect. But we are trying, with real intention, to be a place where LGBTQ+ people in Southeast Michigan can gather, heal, organize, rest and imagine a future that includes all of us — a place where our elders feel honored, our youth feel protected, our trans and nonbinary community feels centered and our BIPOC community feels seen, where every person who walks through the door feels like they matter.

Pride gives us a chance to reconnect with that purpose.

So this June, I hope you'll stop by. Come to an event, join a conversation, bring a friend — bring your whole self. Let Pride be the spark that brings you through our doors and makes this the start of something new.

Affirmations is rediscovering itself. And I hope you'll rediscover us, too.

Happy Pride!

2026 Pride Calendar

Continued from page 16

and a truly inspiring ratio of glitter to population.

Take Ironwood, perched way up at the UP's western edge, where they're throwing their sixth annual Pride fest like the pros they are. Not all the events have been announced, but keep your eye on their Instagram for the most up-to-date details. And check them out all year round for activities leading up to Pride; they partner with the community for warm-up events like Fruity Yoga, a community-born musical and even a punk rock prom held (as God intended) at an Episcopal Church.

Kalamazoo Pride (through June 6)

Arcadia Creek Festival Place (145 E. Water St., Kalamazoo), 6 p.m.-midnight and Saturday, June 6, 2 p.m.-midnight

outfrontkzoo.org/pride

Kalamazoo Pride 2026 is once again taking over Arcadia Creek Festival Place with the sparkle fully back and working overtime. Friday night opens strong with theater and dance, then builds to the main event: the Mx/Ms/Mr Kalamazoo Drag Pageant with Monique Madison, show director and host, as well as 2025's Ms Kalamazoo Pride, Jade Harmony.

Saturday is your classic "wander, learn, acquire small joyful objects" situation — browse vendors, snag a few pronoun pins, actually read the info at community resource tables (growth!) and run into 12 of your closest exes.

The festival supports the year-round offerings from Outfront Kalamazoo, including their crucial mental health navigation services, queer craft nights, family events, LGBTQ+ career services and help with getting identification. Stay for the weekend. Let the glitter fix what it can.

Saturday, June 6

Community Pride Michigan (Saugatuck-Douglas)

Parade: Saugatuck High School (401 Elizabeth St., Saugatuck), 10:30 a.m.

Pride in the Park: Beery Field (8 Center St., Douglas), 11:30 a.m.- 6 p.m.

communitypridemi.org

Community Pride Michigan does not just tip their collective toes into Pride — they do a full cannonball. You need to see their entire list of events to believe it, but let's just say if you've been waiting with rainbow-bated breath to participate in your first (openly) queer Pickleball Tournament, you are in luck. Don't miss the Pride Putt Putt, an author event, plus a tea dance and a paddle cruise. Music from Sixteen Candles and Hello Weekend.

Keweenaw Pridefest

Calumet Colosseum (110 Red Jacket Road, Calumet), 1-5 p.m.

keweenawpridefest.org

Keweenaw Pridefest is hosting a day of lawn games, live music and community tables that they're calling "More than just a party. It's a celebration of being queer and overcoming adversity."

In the meantime, you can attend their May 30 fundraiser, the Big Goat Farm Open House. If you can read the description ("Want to cuddle baby goats while listening to music and snacking on delicious food?") without it melting your heart, check your pulse; you might not even be human!

Meridian Pride

Marketplace on the Green (1995 Central Park Drive, Okemos), 5-10 p.m.

meridian.mi.us/about-us/calendar/meridian-pride-event

Meridian's fourth annual Pride is back to early June. Check out the township website for updates on performers and more.

Lowell Pride

Lowell Riverwalk, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

lowellpride.org

Motor City Pride (Detroit)

Festival: Saturday, June 6, Hart Plaza, 1-9 p.m., and Sunday June 7, 12:30-7 p.m.

Parade: Sunday, June 7, noon. Kick-off at Fort & Griswold, ends at Hart Plaza.

motorcitypride.org

With the theme "Unshaken Rooted in Pride, Leading in Love," Motor City Pride returns to Hart Plaza June 6-7. Michigan's largest LGBTQ+ celebration (tickets required) spreads across the Pride Stage, Pyramid Stage and Dance Stage, wrapping Sunday with the traditional Pride parade stepping off at noon from Fort and Griswold streets through downtown Detroit.

The Pride Stage Saturday headliner is Jai Rodriguez ("Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," "Stop! That! Train!"), with performer Baddie Brooks (Miss Trans Michigan 2025) opening the ceremony in her Motor City Pride debut. Also on the Saturday Pride Stage: The KB, The Science Fair, Better Love, Sabin's Drag Show and Pole Starz DET. Sunday's Pride Stage features "RuPaul's Drag Race" Season 16 contestant Mhi'ya Iman Le'Paige, Season 2 veteran Jessica Wild ("All Stars 8"), Detroit rapper Tiny Jag, multi-award-winning artist Alise King, PRISM Chorus and Sophie Grey.

On the Dance Stage, Stacey Hotwaxx Hale (Detroit's Godmother of House) anchors Saturday, joined by Brooke Steele, LadyMonix, Rimarkable and Ashton Swinton. Sunday features We1sman, Anti and Tylr_. The Pyramid Stage spotlights local and regional talent both days, with a Strut Honey Fashion Show Sunday afternoon.

See **2026 Pride Calendar**, page 22



FAMILY PRIDE

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June 20

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Adults 18+

June 27

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Festival

**Drag Show
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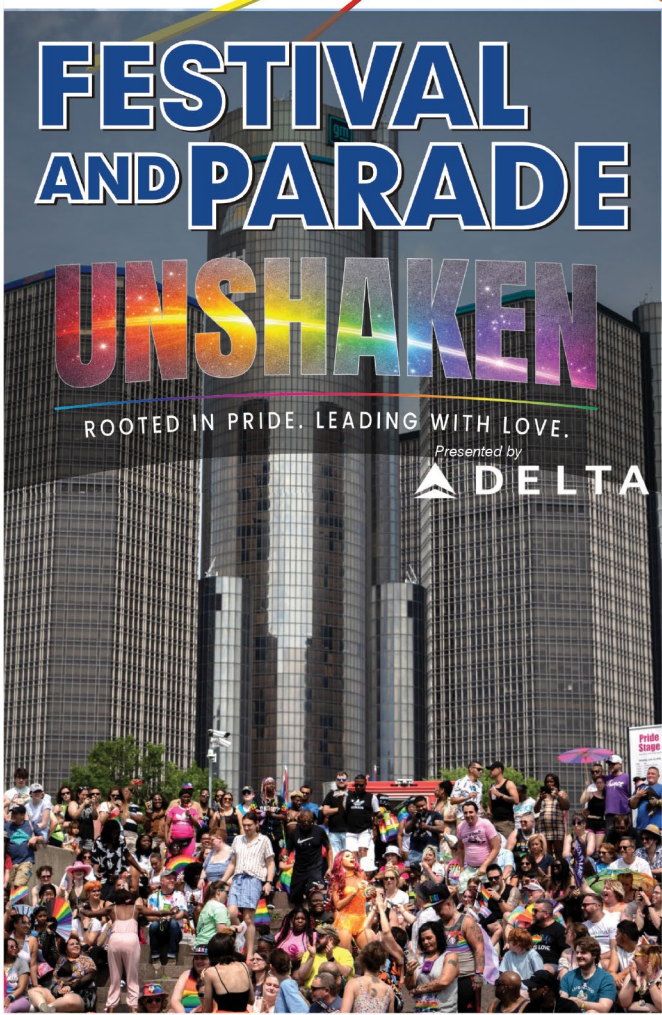


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SATURDAY JUNE 6

Time	Activity
1:00 pm	Festival Opens
1:00 – 6:00 pm	Family Area
1:00 – 8:00 pm	Vendor and Sponsor Booths
1:00 – 8:00 pm	History Area
1:00 – 8:30 pm	Beverage and Food Sales
1:00 – 9:00 pm	Three Stages of Entertainment
8:00 pm	Gates Close (No Readmission)
9:00 pm	Festival Closes

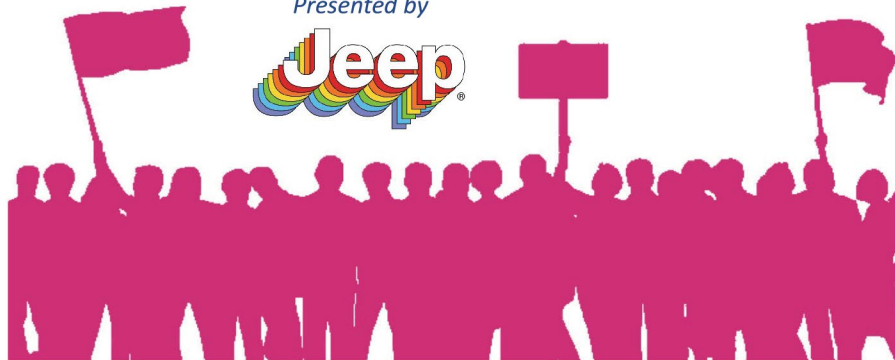
SUNDAY JUNE 7

Time	Activity
Noon	Parade Step off
12:30 pm	Festival Opens
12:30 – 6:30 pm	Beverage and Food Sales
12:30 – 6:00 pm	Vendor and Sponsor Booths
12:30 – 6:00 pm	History Area
12:30 – 7:00 pm	Three Stages of Entertainment
1:00 – 5:00 pm	Family Area
6:00 pm	Gates Close (No Readmission)
7:00 pm	Festival Closes



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Muskegon Pride

Hackley Park (350 W. Webster Ave., Muskegon), 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

muskpride.org

The Muskegon Pride Festival organizers can't wait to greet us on rainbow-studded streets, so plan your calendars around the festival at Hackley Park, with tables, vendors and entertainment to be announced soon! If you can't wait until June to get your Pride on, check out their ongoing programming including Coffee With Friends, Golden Years Lunches and a weekly all-ages transgender, genderqueer and gender nonconforming social group.

Village Pride

Village Biergarten (1420 Van Dyke St., Detroit), 2-8 p.m.

[instagram.com/village_pride_detroit](https://www.instagram.com/village_pride_detroit)

Detroit's West Village and Indian Village neighborhoods join forces for the annual Village Pride fest, featuring DJs, a fashion show, voguers and vendors, all in support of Ruth Ellis Center.

Saturday, June 13

East Lansing Pride

Albert El Fresco (Albert Ave. between Grove Street and M.A.C. Ave.), 4-9 p.m.

cityofeastlansing.com/2548/East-Lansing-PRIDE

This year, East Lansing Pride is bringing back their legendary open floor drag show, live music, more than 50 local vendors and, of course, drag story time!

Flat River Pride

Black Field (201 W. Judd St., Greenville), 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

eventbrite.com/o/107208455491

Could anything be more lovely for our little literary nerd hearts than a Pride event co-sponsored by a library? Flat River Pride is just that! Join Flat River Community Library and the Voices of Flat River Pride in an intentionally ally-friendly afternoon at Black Field. Organizers promise music, vendors, community resource tables and activities, including activities for the kids! If you'll be enjoying yourself at one of the dozens of other Pride events this Saturday, consider checking out other events Flat River Pride



is organizing, including mentor training, coffee hours and their cheekily named Gay Pizza Mondays.

Grand Haven Pride

Lynn Sherwood Waterfront Stadium (1 N. Harbor Drive, Grand Haven), noon-TBD

ghpride.org/festival

Grand Haven Pride is returning for its fourth year and is still seeking (you guessed it) food and other vendors, as well as a few enthusiastic volunteers to make the whole event work. Too much commitment? You can sign up for their email newsletter just so you can keep track of all the going-ons.

Michiana PrideFest (Niles)

Tyler Fields (1329 Lake St., Niles) 10 a.m.- 6 p.m.

outcenter.org/pridefest

This year's Michiana PrideFest has the folks at OutCenter Southwest Michigan announcing a community field day with a brand-new home at Tyler Fields! If your queer heart is aching for the softball fields of your youth (or that catcher on your high school team who never quite understood what version of the game she wanted to play), don't miss the outdoor happenings. And also, don't forget the sunscreen for your brand new tattoo.

Upper Peninsula Rainbow Pride (Marquette)

Mattson Lower Harbor Park (200 N. Lakeshore Blvd.), noon-11 p.m.

uprainbowpride.org/events

UP Pride is turning 11 this year and they're back with entertainment, art activities and, of course, pasties (the kind you wear and the kind you eat). They haven't announced all the performers yet, but in the meantime, you don't even have to leave your house to be inspired by UP Pride; check out this wall of affirmations they've put together.

Warren City Pride

Warren Civic Center (1 City Square, Warren), noon-8 p.m.

warrencitypride.com

Warren City Pride is a great Pride event for folks with younger kids as they ask all entertainers to sign a "hey I promise I'm going to perform for all ages" affidavit in order to perform at the festival. See you there, rainbow family folks!

Sunday, June 14

Plymouth Pride

Old Village Neighborhood (Liberty Street, Plymouth), 2-6 p.m.

oldvillageplymouth.com/pride

Liberty Street in Plymouth will be closed for the third annual Pride event (how time flies!) and converted into a fabulous,

fun space for all. Check out the vendors, resource tables and, of course, an amazing Pride stage with DJ Whitney Who! and drag performers all afternoon.

Saturday, June 20

Cass County Pridefest

Library Pavilion (206 Main St., Dowagiac) 4-8 p.m.

outcenter.org/cass-county-pridefest

Cass County Pridefest is one sparkling stop on the Pridefest On Tour trifecta, dreamed up by the fine folks at OutCenter of Southwest Michigan. More information on entertainment coming soon!

Downriver Pride (through June 21)

Downtown Wyandotte, June 20, noon-11 p.m., June 21, noon-8 p.m.

downriverpride.com

Downriver Pride is bringing two full days of joy, glitter-adjacent energy and the kind of community that makes you text someone, "You should've come." Plus, food that understands the assignment (come hungry, leave with zero regrets) and entertainment TBA but definitely TBRA (To Be Really Amazing).

Fenton Pride

Rackham Park (150 S. Leroy St.), 1-5 p.m.

fentonpride.org

The heart of Fenton Pride lives in Rackham Park with the Fenton Pride Collective, vendors and community orgs, but the fun doesn't stop there. Local downtown businesses are also getting in on the action, offering sweet discounts and special Pride-themed food and drinks. New this year, organizers have added another warm-up event called Drag Me to Bingo, which probably won't require you to drag any of your friends there. Food, drinks and prizes are promised!

Also, Fenton Pride Collective put out a few episodes of a podcast last summer, so while you wait for Pride Month, you can catch up on what happened last summer!

Grand Rapids Pride (through June 21)

Calder Plaza (320 Ottawa Ave. NW, Grand Rapids). June 20, noon-10 p.m., June 21, noon-8 p.m.

grpride.org/pride-festival

Grand Rapids Pride Festival is back to being free (and therefore ungated, so make sure you check out their detailed access page for more information) and they can't wait to welcome everyone for the now two-day festival. Join the party, as West Michigan comes out (again!) to celebrate radical joy, community and the beautiful

See **2026 Pride Calendar**, page 28

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2026 Festival

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- Territorial Brewing Beer Garden 
- 18+ After Party

ZACH WITNESS IS DONE PLAYING IT STRAIGHT

Short shorts, no apologies — the New York-based producer is closing out Ferndale Pride’s Woodward Dance Stage and he’s not hiding a thing

BY KEITH LANGSTON

Zach Witness is a musician, producer and audio engineer who has worked with some of the biggest names in the business, like Erykah Badu and André 3000 — collaborators he made music with in his bedroom while his mom knocked on the door asking if they needed anything.

In more recent years, he’s begun releasing his own music as well, with his first EP dropping in 2017 and his hit EP “New Life” debuting in 2025. Though he dived first into the world of hip-hop, Witness has expanded his horizons, with his new music a mix of pop and eclectic indie, all with dance and electronic undertones.

The artist has bounced around a lot since gaining fame, starting in Dallas before moving to London. He now lives in New York. But on May 30, he’s making his way to Michigan, closing out the Woodward Dance Stage at Ferndale Pride from 8 to 10 p.m. We caught up with the budding star to chat about his rising career, his exploration of

queerness and what he plans on checking out during his inaugural Michigan visit.

First off, I’d love a little background on your career. From what I hear, you were a high school DJ who found your way into hip-hop, and that essentially started your professional music journey?

Yeah, I started playing drums at about 8 years old, and that’s when I knew music was going to be my purpose. When I was 11, I got switched into a public school where I was the only white kid, and found myself being immersed in Black culture. I got into DJing and got involved in the hip-hop scene. I started performing at parties, and by 15, I was DJing on the radio. At 16, I started performing at a big club called Skatium. There, I got really attuned to a musical movement happening at the time called Dallas Boogie and performed under the name DJ White Chocolate.

From there, I started producing music in my free time and started making beats and sending them to rappers. Eventually, I started working with them. But around the age of 17, I started really recognizing my sexuality, and hip-hop at the time was largely homophobic. It became really difficult to exist in that world now that I had this awareness of

myself. So I ended up stepping away from the scene because it felt like I needed to bring through this part of myself, and I couldn’t do it there.

So what happened after that? You ended up working with some big names. How did that happen if you stepped away?

Well, during that period, Erykah Badu’s music became really important to me. Almost like spiritual guidance. Her music made me feel like things were going to work out. There were a few years — I call them the cocoon years — where I was really just undergoing a transition from being DJ White Chocolate to being Zach Witness. During that time, I remixed one of Erykah’s songs, “Bag Lady,” which is all about letting go of the past, so it felt really symbolic to me. I think I worked on that remix for like three years, almost as a form of therapy.

Eventually, I released the song on some blogs and SoundCloud, and Erykah heard it. She posted it on Twitter and DM’d me, saying that one day we’d work together. About two weeks later, I saw her at a gig. I introduced myself, and we decided to collaborate.

Zach Witness. Photo: Karlo X./@kx0101

See **Zach Witness**, page 36



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12250 Fort St.

TRENTON
St. Philip Lutheran Church
1790 Fort St.

WATERFORD
Christ Lutheran Church
5987 Williams Lake Rd.

Every Box Tells a Story at This Ferndale Pride Fundraiser

From leather harnesses to gold leaf, Small Packages showcased Southeast Michigan's unique queer artistry

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

If you handed a dozen Southeast Michigan artists a plain cigar box and told them to make something, you'd get a dozen completely different answers, and Small Packages wouldn't want it any other way. The annual Ferndale fundraiser, which held its auction last month ahead of Pride season, challenges local artists to transform the humble little containers into one-of-a-kind pieces, then bids them off to benefit Ferndale Pride. The work that comes back runs the full range: painted, stitched, scorched, layered, politically charged, playfully provocative and everything in between.

This year's auction, which raised \$9,659, brought together artists working across wildly different mediums and perspectives, but with a common thread of wanting to show up for their community in a tangible way. Here's a look at four of the local artists whose work was chosen in 2026.



Jeremy Isaacson

"The Tool Box," Isaacson's Small Packages

entry, lands somewhere between a labor rally and a leather bar — by design. The queer Detroit photographer, who shoots for Son of Isaac Photography, used the cigar box to fuse what he describes as two core passions: queer sexual freedom and working-class struggle. The piece is layered with cultural symbolism drawn from both worlds, marking a departure from his usual portrait work into mixed-media territory he's been deliberately exploring.



Isaacson has spent more than a decade photographing the queer community, rave scene and protests, and his investment in Small Packages went beyond his own submission this year. He also shot the photography for the auction's online listings — a contribution he called an honor, noting that the show's organizers are close friends. "Now more than ever," he tells BTL, "I think it's important to keep Pride alive and accessible."



Nick Szydlo

Szydlo, a queer, nonbinary, multidisciplinary artist who works primarily in leather and textiles, took their Hellraiser obsession and ran with it. Their Small Packages piece, "Schrödinger's Fetish," is a harness-wrapped box that cannot be opened without being destroyed — the leather was woven tight, then torched and shrunk after assembly, sealing whatever's inside

See **Small Packages**, page 30



Photos: Jeremy Isaacson, Son of Isaac Photography

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2026 Pride Calendar

Continued from page 22

messiness of queer interconnectedness.

GR Pride packs Calder Plaza with over 150 vendors, food trucks galore, all-ages activities, a sensory space and performers TBA.

Livonia Pride

Schoolcraft College (18600 Haggerty Road, Livonia), 11 a.m.- 2 p.m.

livoniapride.org

Livonia Pride is back and ready to party in their newish (as of 2025) spot — Schoolcraft College! While the entertainment lineup is still under wraps (ooh, mysterious!), it looks like their social media presence is probably the best way to keep up to date. Show this big-hearted little Pride some love.

Mount Pleasant Pride

Broadway Park (2451 Nish Na Be Anong Road), 2-5 p.m.

greatlakesbaypride.org/regional-pride-celebrations/#mt-pleasant-pride-fest

Mount Pleasant Pride has all their rainbow ducks in a row, so come prepared to hang out, be exactly who you are and maybe eat something fried out of a truck while you're at it. You can greet folks from the newly established Michigan Two Spirit

and Indigiqueer Coalition, shop at booths from local 2SLGBTQIA+ vendors, peruse community partner resources and enjoy an after-party in the form of a drag show.

Saturday, June 27

Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival (Saginaw)

Jolt Credit Union Event Park (300 Johnson St., Saginaw), 11 a.m.- 6 p.m.

greatlakesbaypride.org

The Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival is a free, family-friendly outdoor fest that brings together LGBTQ+ folks, allies, chosen family and supportive humans from all over the region. You'll find retail vendors, community resources, live entertainment, health screenings and a full-on kids' activity zone (because little queers and future allies deserve fun too).

Holland Pride

Kollen Park (240 Kollen Park Dr., Holland), 1-6 p.m.

outonthelakeshore.org/holland-pride

Out On The Lakeshore seems tickled pink (tickled rainbow?) to be bringing back Holland Pride to Kollen Park. You can spend the afternoon soaking up fabulous entertainment, tasty bites from food trucks,

See **2026 Pride Calendar**, page 32



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Small Packages
Continued from page 26

permanently. That interior holds additional art by Szydlo and their friends, and the central tension of the piece is the choice the owner faces: leave it intact, or cut through to find out what's hidden.

Szydlo has contributed to charity art shows before, including Michigan Glass Project and NSO Man in the City, so lending their work to Ferndale Pride felt natural. Their leather work can be found on Instagram at @fatstrapleather.



Babar Ahmad

Ahmad's "Seeds of Unity" is a hand-painted wooden box finished with gold leaf, its lid decorated with pomegranates — symbols of life and abundance in Persian and Eastern cultures. Inside, the box is lined with Persian script, and Ahmad displays the piece on a small "Stop War" rug, a deliberate contrast meant to underscore



how easily beauty and heritage can be lost to conflict. The gold leaf, he says, represents what's truly precious: peace, culture and human connection.

Ahmad, who identifies as a queer, Muslim, South Asian man, says his identity drives his practice of bridging communities and cultures through layered, tactile work. He brought that same impulse to his reasons for participating in the show, writing that

he hopes to expand the conversation around what LGBTQ+ life encompasses. "While the LGBTQ+ community is often viewed through a very specific, sometimes narrow lens," he says, "I believe it is important to showcase our shared interests in broader, thought-provoking subjects." Find Ahmad's work on Instagram at @babar_arthouse.



Alyxander LaBranche

LaBranche, a Black, biracial trans man who primarily works in ink using a crosshatching technique, returned to painting for the first time in seven years to create his Small Packages entry, "Peek-a-Cock." The piece features an idealized male figure — censored on the outside of the box, fully revealed when opened — a choice he made deliberately to reflect the visibility and censorship that shape queer experience. He leaned into the natural wood grain of the cigar box, using neutral tones so the painted background could fade organically into the surface.

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His reasons for participating stretched beyond the work itself. LaBranche wrote that Ferndale Pride has long felt like a haven to him because of its accessibility — something that mattered deeply growing up with financial limitations. As a trans man who is often perceived as cisgender, he described moving through predominantly

cisgender, heterosexual spaces by default, and calls that isolation “extremely lonely.” Small Packages offered a way in: a community-centered art space where his work could support accessibility and queer celebration at the same time.

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Menswear that Men Swear By
Puzzle can be found on page 35

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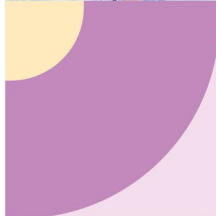
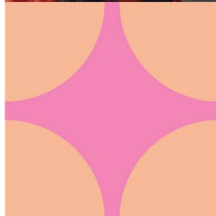
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2026 Pride Calendar

Continued from page 28

awesome merch, helpful resources and fun for every age — from toddlers to chosen aunts. Don't forget about their other offerings during Pride week: a fiber fest, an open mic night at the library and a 100 percent disco-themed ball!

Lansing Pride

Old Town (216 Cesar E. Chavez Ave.), 1-9 p.m.

lansingpride.org

Lansing Pride is Mid-Michigan's biggest celebration, and that Mid-Michigan energy refuses to stay politely contained in a single weekend. It all kicks off June 3 with a Pride Flag-raising ceremony — because if certain folks would rather not see it flying at places like Stonewall National Monument, Lansing will simply raise a few more and call it community service (and yes, be a little cranky about it). From there, it's a joyful sprint: multiple days of pageants, drag shows in various states of fabulousness and a white party where you will absolutely see at least one outfit that makes you reconsider your entire wardrobe. All roads lead to the big Pride Festival on June 27, packed with all-day entertainment, local and national talent and a few delightful surprises.

Monroe County Pride

St. Mary's Park (111 W. Elm Ave., Monroe), 1-7 p.m.

monroecountypride.org

Monroe County Pride is bringing together local drag, resources, food trucks, an art market and every single one of your exes! Deliberately family friendly... and free!

Twin Cities PrideFest

Shadowland Pavilion (101 Broad St., Silver Beach County Park), 12-8 p.m.

outcenter.org/twin-cities-pridefest

Now strutting into its fabulous sixth year, Twin Cities PrideFest is the seasoned icon of the PrideFest On Tour crew — the glamparent with great stories, excellent taste and a beach bag full of sparkle. This joyful, sun-soaked bash at Silver Beach County Park brings the kind of energy where the lake is shimmering, the vibes are immaculate and everyone looks just a little bit better in flip-flops.

Sunday, June 28

Berkley Pride Block Party

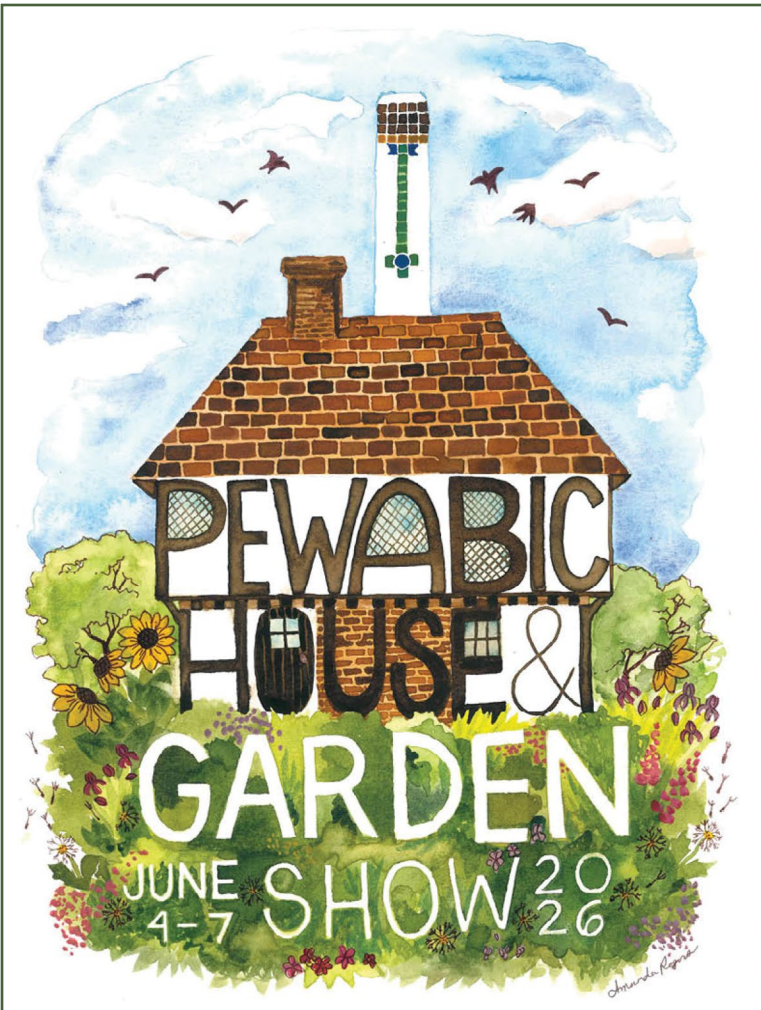
Downtown Berkley, 1-5 p.m.

instagram.com/berkeleypride

Berkley Pride is back in Downtown Berkley (between Robina and Griffith, just south of 12

See **2026 Pride Calendar**, page 34





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Relax in the weekend biergarten to live music by the Stereobabe (Sat) and Pinter Whitnick (Sun), delicious eats from Nu Deli (Sat) and Detroit BBQ Co. (Sun), and drinks from Dog & Pony Show Brewing and Eastern Marketing Brewing Co.



Learn more at: PEWABIC.ORG/GARDENPARTY

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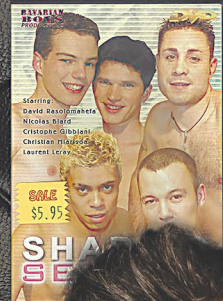
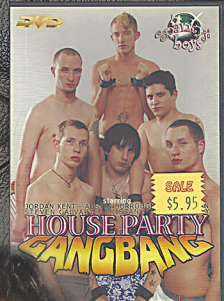
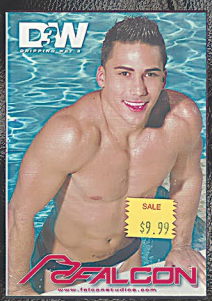
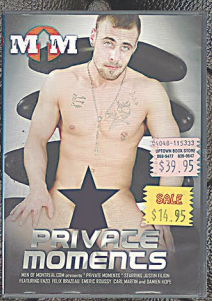
Tickets at Eventbrite

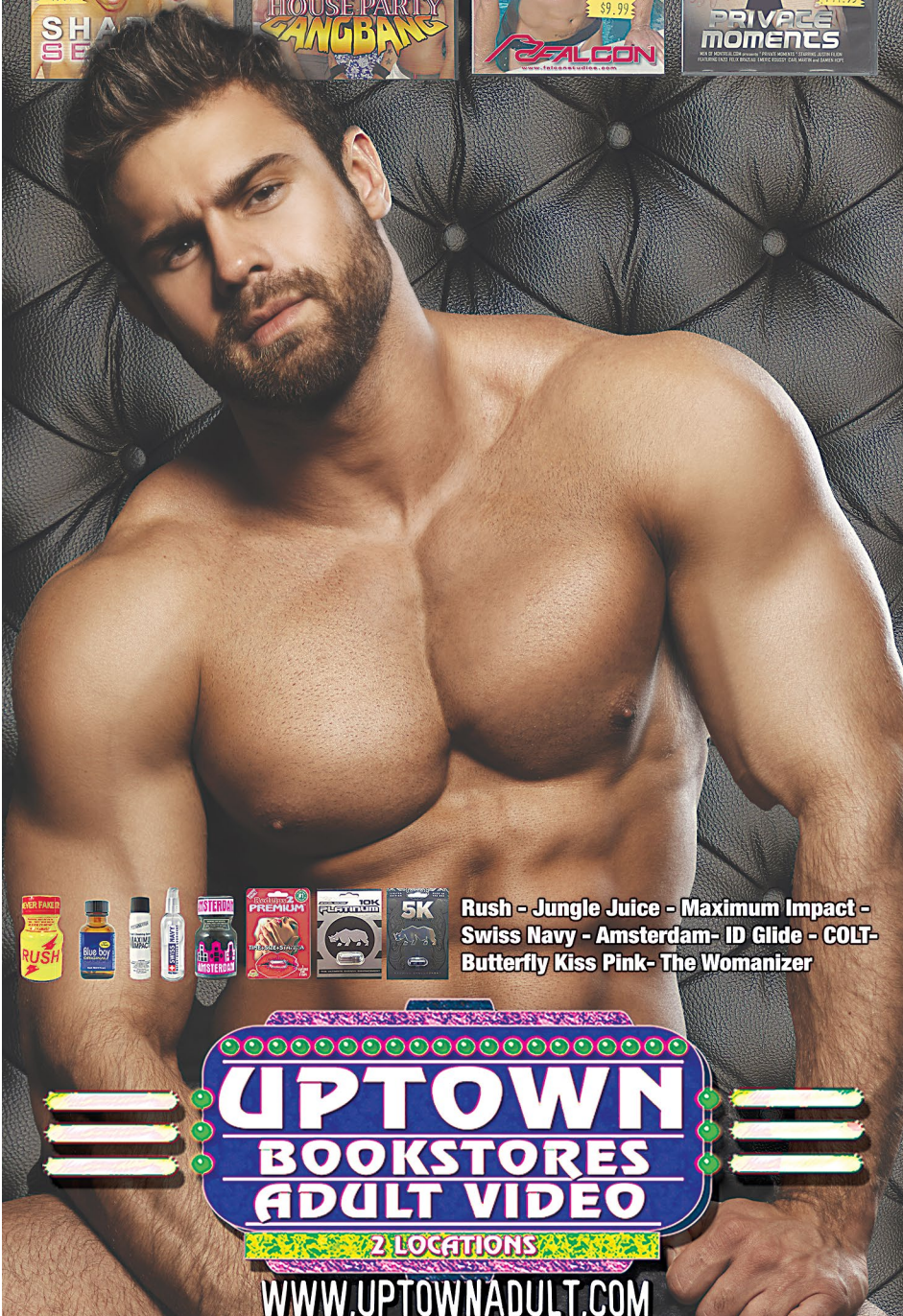


Models - Eros & Bedbug
Photo - Sean Graham



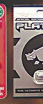
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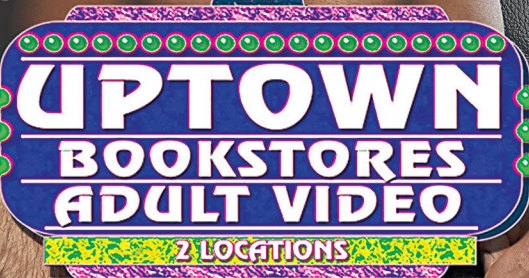







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2026 Pride Calendar

Continued from page 32

Mile), and it's the kind of free, family-friendly celebration that makes you remember how good it feels to be in community. What started as a grassroots gathering has grown into a vibrant, joy-filled event where neighbors, families and friends come together to celebrate love, authenticity and belonging. Plenty of free parking makes it that much easier to show up.

Bluewater Pridefest (Port Huron)

Downtown Port Huron (McMorran Plaza), 1-7 p.m.

bluewaterallies.com/team-1

Bluewater Pridefest takes over downtown Port Huron for this family-friendly event that will include a special kids' zone (rumors of a cute clown abound), entertainment, amazing food and big queer smiles!

Buchanan Pride

The Common (122 Days Ave., Buchanan), 1-8 p.m.

buchananpride.com

Buchanan Pride on The Common has a little something for everyone and a full day of joy

starting with a vibrant vendor market!

DeWitt Pride in the Park

Riverside Park (405 S. Bridge St., DeWitt), noon-3 p.m.

midewittpride.org

See the full calendar at pridesource.com — and in our June 4 issue!

The third annual DeWitt Pride in the Park promises more of the same family-friendly fun that brought the community together the past few years, including games, activities, snacks and more.

South Haven Pride

Stanley Johnston Park (202

Dyckman Ave., South Haven), June 27, noon-10 p.m. June 28, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

facebook.com/southhavenmichiganpride

South Haven is a two-day love letter to community, connection and showing up exactly as you are. Hosted by South Haven LGBTQ+ Advocacy, Saturday is the big celebration (noon-10 p.m.), with a picnic-in-the-park vibe, live entertainment all day, kid games, crafts, carnival-style fun, a lively vendor market and a food fair that absolutely understands your snack priorities. This year, they added a Sunday portion, with a laid-back vendor fair. And do not under any circumstances miss the Free Mom Hugs booth!

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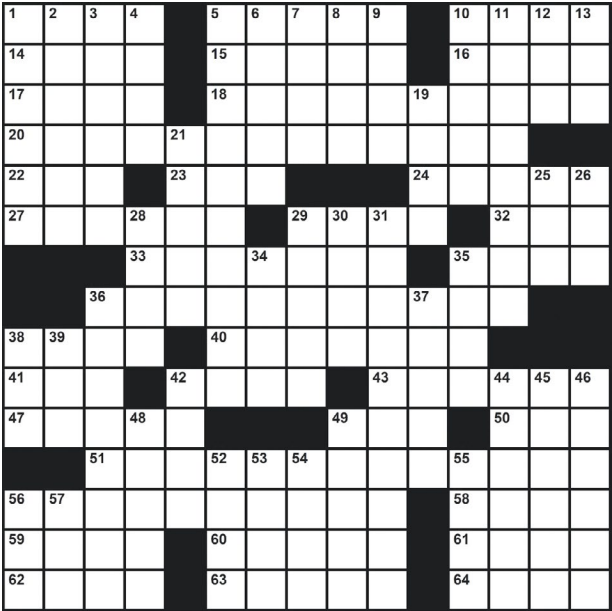


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Across

- 1 Put out a feeler
- 5 Reading at Metropolitan Community Church
- 10 Weighty volume
- 14 Suffix with refer

- 15 Game show host
- 16 Generous words
- 17 "Dial ____ Murder"
- 18 Package with supporting film footage
- 20 Menswear designer known for hand-painted garments
- 22 Prefix with corn
- 23 Jason of "Chasing Amy"
- 24 Wishful words
- 27 The Bee Gees' "____ Alive"
- 29 It requires several G-strings
- 32 Carnaval town
- 33 Fill to excess

- 35 Interest of armchair athletes
 - 36 Menswear designer of Saint Laurent and Celine
 - 38 Cast aspersions on
 - 40 Loeb's partner
 - 41 Kevin Bacon in "Footloose"
 - 42 Ecclesiastical offices
 - 43 Sneezer's request
 - 47 Ready for use
 - 49 Valentines' mo.
 - 50 Pfc.'s superior
 - 51 Menswear designer of the Random Identities line
 - 56 Play on which "Cabaret" is based
 - 58 Desert-like
 - 59 Brussels composer Jacques
 - 60 Emmy winner Jimmy
 - 61 Auntie of Broadway
 - 62 Seaside bird
 - 63 Rent sign
 - 64 In the sack
- 13 Finless fish
 - 19 Sink sound
 - 21 Work with Trojans
 - 25 Spot it Vegas
 - 26 Forever and a day
 - 28 River of Flanders
 - 29 Circles over Mary and Peter
 - 30 Take it from me
 - 31 Time long, long ago
 - 34 Peekaboo words
 - 35 Drops the curtain on
 - 36 "Tallyho!" cries
 - 37 It may be airtight
 - 38 Sign of a big crowd
 - 39 Sportscaster Berman
 - 42 Some writers work on it
 - 44 Amulet for Antony's girlfriend
 - 45 Working hours
 - 46 Said nothin', for example
 - 48 "____ told by an idiot" (Shakespeare)
 - 49 Strong suit
 - 52 Fleet-footed
 - 53 Shells and slugs
 - 54 Producer Meron
 - 55 Priest of the East
 - 56 "When Will ____ Loved"
 - 57 LAX letters

Down

- 1 Time of the Caesars
- 2 ____ terrible
- 3 Robert Burns' country
- 4 Oooooooh, once
- 5 One of the dividers on a scale of 100
- 6 Braggarts blow it
- 7 Aussie hard-rock band
- 8 Actress Remini of "Fired Up"
- 9 Computer's option list
- 10 Trilogy song type
- 11 Like Troy, when the Greeks attacked?
- 12 Mrs., in Marseilles

See p. 31 for answers

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◀ Zach Witness Continued from page 24

I read that you made music with her in your bedroom at your parents' house.

Yeah. She pulled up in a black Porsche, came in and we had some tea. I was burning incense to try and get the house ready for her, but I burnt so much that she couldn't even breathe, and we had to open up all the windows. We knocked out our first track in like 20 minutes, and she released it on SoundCloud.

She ended up coming over again and said she wanted to work on a mix tape and that she wanted me to produce it. For the next two weeks, she came over and we created the mixtape "But You Caint Use My Phone." It was life-changing. Not just releasing it, but creating it. Eventually, André 3000 came over, and all three of us were in my room working on music, while my mom was knocking on the door asking if we needed anything. It was surreal. I kept working with Erykah for a number of years after that as an engineer.

"How pussy can a cat be in a room full of dogs? We all need our spaces. If you're going to attend, get ready to dance your ass off and have fun."

— Zach Witness, Ferndale Pride DJ

That whole story feels like absolute serendipity, and I'm curious where that's taken you to now. I know you moved from London to New York recently. What's your current era looking like?

That experience really helped me absorb so much knowledge, which pushed me to



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start pursuing my own music. That's where I'm at now. I still DJ and produce. Last year I produced an album for Infinite Coles, who is the gay son of Ghostface Killah from Wu-Tang Clan. I'm also helping him with his next album right now. But I'm excited to start sharing my own story, and I'm finishing up what's hopefully going to be my first full album.

Do you think your queerness will influence your music more now that you're creating your own stuff instead of producing for others?

Oh yeah, I think that since moving to New York, I've gotten way gayer. It's been fun to just go out and experience life with other gay men, which feels so huge for me. I think coming from hip-hop, I always had to hide a bit of myself. Like, I always told myself that pop music was too candy ... or disposable. But lately I've become such a pop girlie. Even with my outfits now, I used to worry about wearing something that might make me look gay. But since moving to New York, I don't give a fuck. I'm walking down the street in the shortest shorts ever, and I feel great.

How did your gig at Ferndale Pride come about?

I have a friend in London who ran a lot of the parties I DJed, and she knows the Ferndale Pride team. They said they were looking for a DJ, so she got us in touch. I've never been to Michigan, but I'm always down to play for anyone who wants to dance. I have no idea what to expect, but it seemed like such a fun opportunity, so I said yes. I've been told Ferndale is like the gayborhood for the Detroit area, so I'm really excited to check it out.

Are you excited to perform in a queer space, and do you think it's important to have these queer spaces for entertainment?

Absolutely. How pussy can a cat be in a room full of dogs? We all need our spaces. If you're going to attend, get ready to dance your ass off and have fun.

Do you have any other plans for your time in Michigan?

I'm going to Detroit because it's such a huge music city. I have to visit the Motown Museum and check out Aretha Franklin's house. But Detroit is also a huge space for techno music, so I'm going to check that out too.



Zach Witness. Photo: Ricky Cohete

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Continued from page 8

building, “there’s not even a way to get heard, or representation. There’s community meetings, but that’s only if you feel welcome to go there. And I don’t, so I’m not going there.”

A tangle of problems this deep is difficult to address on an individual level. Personal charity cannot fix systemic issues, but banding together can — especially when those efforts remain open and welcoming to everyone. “A lot of [property owners] are wanting to be affirming,” Hutton says. “They want to be supportive, but they don’t really understand how, or they don’t know what that might look like, or they might have blind spots. They might not realize that there’s issues that they just simply wouldn’t be aware of.”

The work MiGen and organizations like it are doing in Michigan, from wraparound

service navigation to the creation of affirming housing like the Shepherd House, represents exactly the kind of sustained, community-rooted effort that these problems demand. Change at this scale requires a collective persistence, a chorus that holds a steady note together so that even if one vocalist needs to



Shepherd House. Photo: Andrew Potter

take a breath, the others can sustain it. Mutual aid matters, and affirming housing changes lives. But these systems deteriorate faster than any one organization can repair them alone, which means the pressure on institutions to do their part must keep building.

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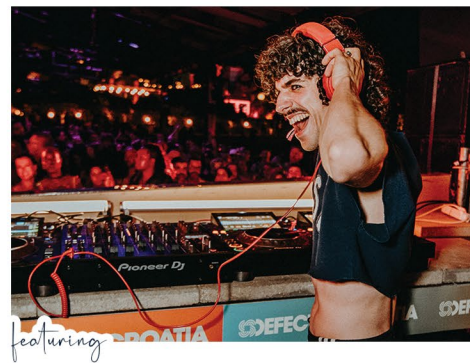
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- 8-10 Zach Witness



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